

Obama needs another record Black turnout to win

Written by George E. Curry NNPA Editor-in-Chief
Tuesday, 24 July 2012 22:52

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – If Black voter turnout reverts to the level it was before Barack Obama was elected president of the United States in 2008, the nation’s first Black president will have a difficult time winning a second term in the White House, concludes a National Urban League report released Monday.

The report, “The Hidden Swing Voters: Impact of African-Americans in 2012,” was written by Madura Wijewarden and Valerie Wilson of the National Urban League Policy Institute based in Washington. The report observed, “In 2012, if the African-American voter turnout rate in every state declines to 60%, which was the national voter turnout rate for African-Americans in 2004, then we estimate:

“President Barack Obama will not win North Carolina – a decline in African-American turnout will lead to a loss of 63,706 votes which is 4.5 times the 2008 margin of victory.

“President Barack Obama will have difficulty winning Ohio and Virginia – lower African-American turnout will lead to a loss of almost a quarter of the margin of victory in 2008.”

President Obama may have difficulty matching the record Black turnout of 2008.

“Some 2.4 million more African-Americans voted in 2008 compared to 2004,” the National urban League Report found. “This was a 16% increase in African-Americans who voted to bring the total to 16.67 million voters.”

And that increase was reflected across various age groups.

“African-Americans between 18 to 44 years old had higher turnout rates than their white (non-Hispanic) counterparts – 6 points higher for 18 to 25 year olds and 1.9 points higher for 26 to 44 year olds,” the report stated. “This was the first time any race/ethnic group had surpassed the white (non-Hispanic) turnout.”

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In addition, the report found: “The number of African-Americans who voted grew by 16.4% between 2004 and 2008 – this was an additional 2.4 million African-American voters. This was 2.11 times the rate of growth in the African-American citizen, over 18 years population.”

African-Americans clearly made a difference in North Carolina, Virginia, Indiana and Florida.

“The 2008 victory by then-Senator Barack Obama in North Carolina was primarily due to the growth in African-American voters in that state,” the report said. “The number of additional African-Americans who voted in North Carolina in 2008 compared to 2004 was nearly nine times the margin of victory in North Carolina – an additional 127,000 African-Americans voted and the margin of victory was 14,177.”

The National Urban League study estimated that if John McCain had received an additional 2 points in support from African-Americans in North Carolina, he would have defeated Obama, a lesson that is apparently not lost on Mitt Romney, who has begun courting the African-American vote.

Growth in the Black vote between 2004 and 2008 in Virginia was nearly equal to Obama’s margin of victory there in 2008. And in Indiana and Florida, African-American growth over that same period represented nearly 80 percent of the margin of victory in those states in 2008, according to the report.

The progress of 2008 could be undermined if efforts to dilute the Black vote are successful, the report said.

“Efforts by several states to introduce voter identification requirements and limitations on early

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and postal voting are casting doubts on whether the diverse electorate of 2008 will be maintained, let alone expanded," it stated. "The stability and legitimacy of the republican form of government depends more on achieving that expansion of the electoral franchise than anything else. This makes 2012 a crucial election."

Even though phenomenal growth has been achieved in Black voter turnout, voter registration has not kept pace with that progress.

The 69.7 percent Black voter registration rate in 2008 was 3.8 percent lower than the rate for whites. But the turnout rate for African-Americans was only 1.4 points lower than whites. If the Black registration rate of 69.7 percent in 2008 can be increased to 78.3 percent –the same rate as for African-Americans in Maryland – and the turnout remains the same as it was in 2008, an additional 3 million African-American voters can be gained this year, according to projections in the National Urban League report.

Getting Blacks registered is half the battle because once they sign up, they are more likely to vote (92.8 percent) than whites (90 percent) or Latinos (84 percent).

Like Bill Clinton before him, Obama became president without winning a majority of the white vote. CNN exit polls in 2008 showed Republican candidate John McCain holding a 54 percent to 45 percent edge over then-Senator Obama among white voters.

The November presidential election will pit Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American president, against Mitt Romney, the first Mormon to win the nomination of a major party for president.

The Urban League report observed, "This expansion of access to the highest office in the land to different racial, ethnic and religious minorities through leadership of both political parties is a cause for celebration."

For Blacks to celebrate again, however, they will have to match or exceed the enthusiasm generated in 2008 by the election of the nation's first African-American president.

As the report reminded readers, "This was perhaps the first time in the history of the world that a

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people had popularly elected a member of a racial minority as their head of state with executive authority.”